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ABSTRACT

The approach to English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction for preschool children at Instituto Crandon, a private elementary-secondary school in Uruguay is described. First, characteristics of Uruguay and its educational system are outlined, stressing the advantages of temperate physical environment and high literacy rate. Then background information on Institute Crandon, established as an American missionary school, is presented. English is taught at the school from preschool through junior college levels, and about 90 percent of students taking British and American language proficiency tests achieve passing marks. The current approach at the preschool level is to have an English-speaking teacher visit the classroom daily and, with the Spanish-speaking teacher, engage the children in critical and logical thinking activities in ways that foster participation, independence, and self-assurance but do not emphasize early production. A brief bibliography, video presentation script, and notes on program participants are appended. (MSE)

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INSTITUTO CRANDON

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NEVER TOO EARLY

EVENT 4468

TESOL 1994

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"SHARING OUR STORIES" TESOL Convention 1994, Baltimore.

NEVER TOO EARLY

A presentation by the preschool teachers from Instituto Crandon, Montevideo, Uruguay.

This is a brief account of the activities we share with our young children in school, which foster the acquisition of the English Language.

The presentation consists of :

I About our country

II About our school

III English at Crandon

IV English and preschoolers

V A video (script adjunct)

I- ABOUT OUR COUNTRY

Uruguay is the smallest Spanish speaking country in South America. It's right between Brazil and Argentina. It has a population of about 3.000.000 inhabitants and nearly 50% live in the capital city called Montevideo. Montevideo is situated on the southern part of the country, on the River Plate. 65 miles East from it, we come to our Atlantic Ocean coast: 324 miles of beautiful sandy beaches you can enjoy from November through March, in case you want to pay us a visit on your next vacation.

Weather-wise we do not have the extremes you find in this country, it never snows and in temperatures it might get as high as 36º Centigrades being the lowest around 1ºC. We very rarely have temperatures below 0ºC.

We also have other advantages, thinking of school attendance. We have no jungles, no high mountains, no deserts, lots of roads,

we can get to any part of the country fairly easily. All these things are favorable for educating our people. Not many obstacles to go to school, even right in the country.

96% Uruguayans are literate. The language spoken in the country, as I said before, is Spanish. Our shcool system provides free public education from elementary school through college, but we also have a great number of private schools, as well.

In the Public school curriculum students have the chance to learn English for 3 years beginning in their 9th grade. At present there is also a pilot program in the 5th grade of public schools. Most private institutions offer a more complete program to learn English, beginning much earlier, which is our case, for instance. In all cities and towns, even the small ones within the country, people have the opportunity to "get in contact" with the English language.

We have schools, institutes dedicated especially to the teaching of English, academies and private tutors who work at home.

II - About Our School

Instituto Crandon belongs to the Methodist Church.

It was founded in 1879 by a very young teacher, who developed close ties with the Methodist Church from the United States. American missionaries taught at our school from the turn of the century till the early sixties. They were responsible for many innovations, true pioneers in the field of education in Uruguay: the teaching of a foreign language, physical education, home economics, field trips and outings among other.

We have tried to keep true to their innovative heritage, and we constantly revise our plans, activities and approach, to cater for the students' and teachers' needs and interests, and our changing national and global situation.

III) English at Crandon

At present, English is taught from preschool through Junior College. We start at the early age of 3, and continue along primary, high school and the secretarial courses at our Junior College. Time allotted varies from 30 minutes a day with the 3 year olds, through a whole afternoon in Primary, to 8 hours a week in high school.

Many of our students, sit for various Britsh International exams and the University of Michigan Certificate of Proficiency in English. Our rate of approval is around 90%

IV) English and preschoolers

Throughout the years, we have come to favor our present approach, based on what we have learned from our own students, as confronted to the varied learning theories we have studied about. Every language is an instrument: of communication, of expression of one's inner self, of apprehension of knowledge, of intellectual and social development.

In Nursery and Kinder classes, there are two teachers (one of Spanish another one of English) simultaneously and a teacher of English pays a daily visit to the 3 year old groups.

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Language and development of thought

We know of the importance of the acquisition of more than one language, how this contributes to the flexibility of thinking strategies and the widening of social skills. We also know of the role that getting to know other people and cultures plays in broadening understanding and fostering good will. And we also know how much children enjoy learning new codes of communication when this is done through enjoyment, with stress placed on the affective aspects, in a loving an supportive environment.

Critical thinking is stimulated through classifying, observing, categorizing, describing games and science activties, usually agreed upon by both teachers: Spanish an English. Computer literacy, especially Logo language, also contributes to this aspect.

Language as a springboard for action

Young children are a synonym of movement. They learn by discovering and constantly exploring surrounding space with all their senses, their whole body. Actions, games, acting-out, music and songs are crucial. We focus on acquisition as a developmental process.

Language and personal growth

At school, our educational policy is such that it tends to foster independence and self-assurance. Language learning plays an essential role in this area.

Children's mastery of the language grows as they themselves grow into school children. Mistakes are considered an important part of this process. In Ann Lippincott's words, they are "natural, normal, necessary and fun". And they are a "present for the class", as Gattegno put it. They allow us to have "the feel" of the process, of the group, of each child, and to build from them.

We like to think that we allow our children the time they need to let new acquisitions "soak in". A "silent period" as Adrian Underhill calls it, in which they listen to their inner self. No sound learning takes place unless we help this process to develop.

We welcome all production the children are willing to share, but we do not force it. In David Vale's words, "the spoken word comes as a bonus" when the teaching situation ensures the child's relaxed participation.

Our experience has shown us that occasional interferences between L1 and L2 do not hinder the acquisition of either one. We believe that the earlier we give the child the opportunity to grasp as powerful an instrument as language is, the longer he can enjoy its advantages. As we are respectful of each child's rate of learning, this acquisition is pleasurable and significant.

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INSTITUTO CRANDON

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Alicia Diaz
Fernanda Blanco
and others

" Never too Early "

SUMMARY

(and video script)

At Crandon, a 115 year-old Methodist School in Montevideo, Uruguay, English has been taught since the turn of the century. Constantly revising our teaching practices, we have gradually lowered the age at which we introduce the second language. At present, we start with the 3 year-olds and continue until their senior year in high school.

Through varied techniques, our children are exposed to the language in a meaningful and enjoyable way. Everyday life and the child's own views of the world are our starting points. Accent is placed on affectiveness and involvement, on reaction to teacher's stimulus by three year-olds, through action and performance, on to production and beginning reading by five year-olds.

Our video shows our 3, 4 and 5 year-olds engaged in all the activities we share with them daily. In our particular school setting, two teachers are in charge of each group of 4 and 5 year-olds, one of Spanish and one of English. A teacher of English pays a daily visit of no more than 45 minutes to the three year-old groups.

An " English Syllabus " is designed by the teachers and undergoes as many changes as needed throughout the school year, according to group and children's characteristics, likes, dislikes, maturity.

Nursery rhymes, as part of the English cultural background, are a key feature. So are counting and action games, songs, story-telling, drama, arts and crafs, cooking. Content based activities, as well as those which involve science and critical thinking are planned and devised together with the Spanish teacher so they are reinforced and enriched.

We make a point of using English in every possible setting, including outings and camping. And some of our kindergarten teachers are introducing their kids into reading and writing, provided they show an interest towards them.

Our approach, in Benjamin Franklin's words,

" Tell me, and I'll forget
Teach me and I'll remember
Involve me and I'll learn."

Biographical statements for the program

Fernanda Blanco	-	Teacher of English at pre-school, elementary and advanced levels since 1985 at private and public schools.
Laura Casaretto	-	Pre-school teacher, has taught English to 4 year-olds since 1983.
Ofelia Dagnino	-	Pre-school teacher of English since 1989 - CELT University of Cambridge 1992.
Alicia Diaz	-	Coordinator, English Department at Crandon, Montevideo. 20-year experience in EFL.
Ketty Fernández	-	English teacher since 1976. Former exchange student in Topeka, Ks. Pre-school, elementary, advanced levels.
Adriana Rojas	-	Crandon graduate, pre-school and primary school teacher since 1970.
Susana Romero	-	Teacher aid since 1979. Teacher of English since 1982. (Pre-school and Primary).
Rosalía Ruiz	-	Teacher of English, pre-school and primary. Teaches adults in the night shift since 1986.
Adriana Torres	-	Teacher of English, working on a Master degree in Psychology.
Giselle Tudurí	-	Pre-school teacher, has taught English to 3 and 4 year olds since 1981.
Mónica Vidal	-	Teacher aid since 1978, pre-school teacher of English for 8 years.